

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION FACT SHEET

USDA organic regulations outline the living conditions producers must provide for certified organic livestock. The regulations specify that poultry living conditions must be sufficient to accommodate their health and natural behavior, including year round access to the outdoors. The regulations also prohibit the continuous indoor confinement of any animal. **7CFR §205.239**

What are the general requirements for outdoor access for poultry?

According to the USDA organic regulation 7 CFR 205.239, the outdoor access area must provide year round access to the outdoors. The area, whether a yard or field, must be suitable to the species, its stage of life, the climate and environment. Outdoor access areas must include:

- Shade
- Shelter
- Exercise areas
- Fresh air
- Clean water for drinking
- Direct sunlight

Any outdoor access area must be free of prohibited substances for three years and be included as part of the producer's organic system plan.

Shade, shelter and exercise areas should be large enough for and designed to accommodate all birds that would use them in the course of their natural behavior.

Examples of outdoor access systems include: mobile hoop-style chicken tractors moved throughout field paddocks, stationary coop or building with electric net fencing to rotate paddock areas in field, free-range poultry in orchard or yard with coop or trees for shelter.

Examples of features that accommodate natural behavior include: vegetation to encourage foraging, ponds for waterfowl to swim in, objects to perch on and/or provide cover from predators, or blinds to hide from aggressive flock mates.

How should outdoor access areas be managed?

Once an outdoor access area is established it must be managed to ensure continued compliance with the USDA organic regulations, including ongoing efforts to encourage poultry to go outdoors.

Daily management includes making sure livestock have access to the approved outdoor area, and clean water is accessible. To meet requirements long term, producers often rotate livestock through multiple paddocks so each area has time to rest and vegetation has time to recover.

The organic regulations also require producers to manage manure in a manner that does not contribute to contamination of crops, soil, or water by plant nutrients, heavy metals, or pathogenic organisms and optimizes recycling of nutrients.

What size should an outdoor access area be?

The organic regulations do not specify square footage required for outdoor access areas. As part of the certification process, WSDA Organic Program staff will determine if the outdoor access area is adequate using the criteria in 7 CFR 205.239.

In what situations can poultry be temporarily confined?

Continuous total confinement of any animal indoors is prohibited. However, USDA organic regulations do allow for poultry to be *temporarily* confined in very specific situations.

Producers **MUST** submit details on all temporary confinement plans, including clear time periods for ending confinement. Temporary confinement plans, or updates to them, must be approved by WSDA Organic Program prior to implementation.

Temporary confinement of organic poultry may be considered in the following situations:

1. The animal's stage of life

Examples include chicks confined to a brooder or un-feathered birds.

2. Preventative healthcare procedures or the treatment of illness or injury

3. Risk to soil or water quality

Outdoor areas must be managed in a manner that does not put soil or water quality at risk.

4. Sorting or shipping animals for sale

Birds must be under continuous organic management, including use of organic feed, throughout the extent of their temporary confinement .

5. For participation in agricultural events such as 4-H fairs or National FFA Organization

Confinement is restricted to no more than one week prior to the event, through the event and up to 24 hours after the animals have returned to the farm at the conclusion of the event. Continuous organic management, including organic feed, must have been maintained during the extent of their allowed confinement.

6. Inclement weather

Inclement weather events may be thunderstorms, snowstorms, or abnormally low or high daytime temperatures. If temperatures are between 40-90° F, outdoor access is required. Normal cold weather and precipitation in the late fall/winter/early spring are not considered inclement weather and are not cause for confinement.

7. Conditions under which the health, safety, or wellbeing of the animal could be jeopardized

Organic regulations allow temporarily confining animals under conditions that might affect their health, safety and well-being. Two examples are:

a. Predators/Predation

Having organic poultry in outdoor areas may increase the threat of predation from a host of predators – weasels, foxes, bears, dogs, hawks, etc. Poultry producers routinely have to deal with predators and may need to temporarily confine animals because their wellbeing and safety is jeopardized.

Use of temporary confinement is only acceptable if there is an immediate predator threat; confinement of poultry during seasons or timeframes when predators are generally active is not acceptable. Producers must design a production system that protects birds from predators AND allows them access to the outdoors.

b. Avian Influenza

During avian influenza outbreaks poultry may be confined per guidance from federal or state animal health authorities.

What records should be maintained about temporary confinement of poultry?

WSDA Organic Program must approve temporary confinement plans and timelines prior to implementation. Once an approved plan is on file with the Organic Program, producers must keep records of all dates organic animals were confined and the reason for the temporary confinement. Those records must be available for review at an organic inspection.

Additional Resources

[7CFR Part 205.239 Livestock Living Conditions](#)

[National Organic Program Policy Memo 11-5 Access to the Outdoors for Livestock](#)

[National Organic Program Factsheet - Outdoor Access and Temporary Confinement for Poultry](#)

[National Organic Program Guide to Organic Livestock Certification](#)

[Confinement of Organic Poultry due to risk of Avian Influenza](#)



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